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BOOKS & THE ARTS

A Book Held Hostage

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COUNTERCOUP: The Struggle for the Control of Iran. *By Kermit Roosevelt. McGraw-Hill. Withdrawn from publication.*

His Imperial Majesty Mohammed Riza Shah Pahlevi, Aryamehr, Shahanshah of Iran, did not cut a figure as imposing as his titles in the coup which saved his throne—for a time—back in August 1953. The coup wasn't his idea. He felt himself a prisoner in his own palace, was afraid to speak his mind even outdoors, shrank in royal circumlocution from the frank urging of his twin sister, Princess Ashraf, that the time had come to act. The British had put the Shah in power in 1941, when he was just 21, but had since written him off as hopelessly irresolute. A British diplomat proposed a "pendulum theory" to explain the Shah's erratic soaring and plunging. In one mood he felt as dazzling as the gorgeous medals on his royal chest; he even told a French interviewer, years later, that God, personally, told him what to do. But the Shah's sense of destiny was only wind; he might go to bed a king and wake up in self-doubt and despondency, certain all was lost. He was far from being the ideal sort of man to seize power from a popular demagogue, but there was no one else in 1953 when the British and the Americans decided that Mohammed Mossadegh was slipping into the Russian orbit, and had to go.

Of course this is not quite the way Kermit Roosevelt describes the Shah in *Countercoup*. Restoring the Shah to power is probably the happiest memory of Roosevelt's life, and he is the friendliest of historians. But there is no disguising the tremulous man at the heart of Roosevelt's short, interesting, but problematic account of the events which have been rankling the Iranian national pride ever since.

About 500 copies of Roosevelt's book had reached reviewers and bookstores last September when his publisher, McGraw-Hill, threatened with a libel suit in England by British Petroleum, abruptly canceled the book's official publication and recalled the copies which had already gone out. The entire edition of 7,500—less the few hundred beyond McGraw-Hill's reach—was then pulped, for a loss of about $1.50 a copy. Second thoughts are not often so dramatic. Roosevelt, it appeared, had run afoul of Britain's Official Secrets Act in his original manuscript when he ascribed a role in the coup to the Secret Intelligence Service. The S.I.S. protested to the Central Intelligence Agency, which then insisted that Roosevelt remove all references to British intelligence in the published version of his book. Since the British role had been a large one—even greater than Roosevelt had been ready to acknowledge—this left a considerable gap in the story. Roosevelt solved the problem by simply substituting A.I.O.C.—the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company—for S.I.S. As the successor to the A.I.O.C., British Petroleum protested. Hence the book's withdrawal, so McGraw-Hill could print a new version amending the record.

According to a source at McGraw-Hill, Roosevelt went back to the C.I.A., and the C.I.A. went back to the S.I.S., and it was agreed all around that the best way out of the mess was to publish the first version of the manuscript, which correctly ascribed a role to the British. This time, encouraged by a book club sale, McGraw-Hill printed 15,000 copies and scheduled publication for January. But after the U.S. Embassy was occupied by Iranian militants last November, Roosevelt asked McGraw-Hill to hold up distribution once again, until after the hostages were freed. The new copies of *Countercoup*—apparently identical to the first except for the naming of the S.I.S.—are now sitting in a McGraw-Hill warehouse, as much the hostages of recent history as the fifty Americans being held in Teheran.

The C.I.A.'s role in the 1953 coup has been an open secret since the late 1950s, one of the two public "successes," along with the Guatemalan coup of 1954, habitually cited by the partisans of [illegible] fused political events in Teheran which precipitated the coup. The little he has to say on these matters comes down to sketching in the cast of characters. His associates are also scanted; he not only changes the names, and in some cases the physical descriptions, of other C.I.A. officers but also reduces them to little more than walk-ons. More surprisingly, Roosevelt completely omits the parts played by Frank Wisner, then Roosevelt's boss as deputy director for plans, and by Wisner's chief of operations, Richard Helms. The U.S. Ambassador to Iran, Loy Henderson, is described by Roosevelt as being prissily nervous, and the British are left shadowy in the background. They proposed the project (apparently to Roosevelt himself) in London in November 1952, and thereafter were content with a secondary role in charge of radio communications maintained through a base on Cyprus.

The story Roosevelt tells, stripped of just about all its institutional trappings, has a lighthearted air, as if two or three fellows, not long out of school, had adroitly pulled the whole thing off with a word here, a few dollars there, a little bucking up at the crucial moment. This version of events is not so much untrue as it is incomplete, offhand and unreflective, the sort of story an old man might set down for the pleasure of his grandchildren.

Roosevelt does not make a point of it, but the C.I.A.'s coup was very much the doing of President Eisenhower and John Foster Dulles, who dismissed Mossadegh's claims as an Iranian nationalist, and chose to conclude that secret Russian influence was the source of Iran's squabble over oil with Britain, which, in fact, had balked at negotiating a new and more equitable oil concession. Eventually Iran nationalized the A.I.O.C., the British were expelled, and Mossadegh went to Truman and Dean Acheson for support and understand-

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